

Old Lovers
Written by Lavinia Goodell
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“John Anderson, my Jo, John,
We’ve clamb the hill thegither;
And mony a canty day, John,
We’ve had wi’ ane anither;
Now we maun totter down, John;
But hand in hand we’ll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my Jo.”

Young lovers are the unfailing theme of poet, philosopher and romancer. Youthful love has been all worked up in verses and stories and essays; it has been turned every way and viewed through all sorts of lenses, till it is fairly worn out – or *would* be, if Love were not immortal, and therefore as young and fresh in the hearts of Will and Mary to-day, as of Adam and Eve in Paradise. As it is, the subject is ever new. The ignorant, untaught girl behind the counter of the corner store, and the refined, cultivated lady reclining carelessly on the sofa of her Bodoir, equally loses consciousness to all around, over the last magazine love-story. Since the days of Homer, the world has not wearied of brave, noble heroes, and fair, lovely maidens. And all this is very beautiful, but O, why do we not hear more of *old lovers*? Are they *so few*? Does love, this same beautiful, earnest, devoted love, die out with youth? Does the hard, and actual of life so over-sweep the ideal? Is love so weak, so easily overcome? *Not always*.

I saw a couple of Old lovers, once, just for a few moments. How much one may see in a moment! A look; a tone of voice; the meeting of two pair of eyes! I shall never forget it. My heart has beat *stronger* ever since! I was traveling in western New York, when, one pleasant May morning found me at the Depot of the little village of C_____ awaiting the next train for the West. It was early when I entered the ladies’ sitting room, and the sole occupants were an aged couple, of probably between seventy and eighty years. The old lady, apparently quite feeble, was leaning back in a large arm-chair, while her companion bent over her in anxious solicitude.

“What shall I do for you, Sally? Perhaps I can get you a cup of tea. Does your head ache?” he asked, gently laying his trembling hand on her wrinkled brow.

“No, John. Nothing now, *unless* – perhaps, you could get a tumbler of water.”

The old man turned, and I met, as I knew I should, a noble brow, and a pair of earnest, sincere, loving blue eyes. His face lighted up as he saw me, and he said with beautiful simplicity, “Sis, will you stay with her, while I go after some water?”

I yielded a glad assent, for my heart warmed toward the dear old people, as it never did to the happiest *young* couple Luna ever smiled upon. She was a simple hearted old woman; had never been fifty miles from home – so she told me – and had never seen a rail-road before, in her life. But now she was going to visit a married daughter, at a distance, and the journey was quite an undertaking for her. “John felt very anxious for her; he had traveled more, and was smarter than she was, and he was afraid it would be too much for her, with her nerves.”

Her dress was simple; a plain, dark calico, neat and clean, and a checked apron, which she informed me she wore "to keep her gown clean." A large paste-board sun-bonnet completed her attire. I thought I could see, in imagination, the small brown house, the large barns, the chickens, the sheep and cows, the plum trees, and rows of currant bushes, and the old well-sweep, which had been her *world*.

Soon "John" returned with the glass of water; and asked her again how she felt; and then he stooped to feel the brick at her feet, for "he was afeard she might catch cold and get the rheumatiz; and so he warmed a brick to put to her feet when they started."

"It is most cold, Sally, but I shall have time to warm it before the cars come. Sis will stay with you," he added kindly, glancing at me.

"He wouldn't leave me alone a minnit!" she said, her eyes following him fondly, as he went out. "I'm glad you're here, sis!" (By the way, I was just eighteen years of age, and considered myself a young lady, *par excellence!*)

And I sat and looked into the old lady's face, as she leaned back, wearily, in her chair. Time had whitened the locks, and furrowed the cheeks and brow, but there was an expression of childlike, simple happiness, which the world too often wears away, and which only a life, lighted by the sunshine of love can retain.

And when "John" had returned, and placed the warmed brick at her feet, he took a seat by her side, and held her hand, and – they met – those two pairs of dimmed, old, blue eyes. How much they spoke! Young eyes meet, sometimes, joyous, sparkling eyes, full of the dew of life's bright morning, and look into each other with a bounding, happy, hopeful love; and young hearts greet, with gladsome throb, the untried future. But those *old* eyes told of a tried love; a love that was strong – that had conquered; told of a love which the dust of the world had not dimmed, which the cares of life had not worn out, which storms had only served to deepen in each heart

I had a vision, as I sat there. I looked through those old faces, back, far back, a long labyrinth of years, and saw them young; saw a tall, manly form, full of the strength and elasticity of youth, saw the dark hair pushed carelessly back from a noble, rounded forehead, saw the quick, intelligent, earnest face. And I saw a slight, girlish figure, with rosy cheeks, and brown curls, and silvery laugh. I saw them part and meet, and exchange gay words, at "quilting" parties, and "spelling schools," and "donations." Then there came visions of Sunday evening calls, and then I saw them one evening, one bright, beautiful evening, sitting under the old apple tree, with the dear, old moon superintending them. The blue sun-bonnet was thrown back, the child-like face upturned, and the dancing, laughing eyes a little sobered by the deep, earnest ones looking down into them. Thus two hearts met, and thus have met many thousand pairs of human hearts – but O, among them all, how few have clung to each other through the summer suns and winter storms of half a century; sharing the same joys, supporting each other in sorrow, bearing with every failing, and loving more deeply, more tenderly, to the last! How often have earthly cares and trifles wearied the spirit, and embittered and estranged the heart, till, ere life has reached its meridian, each soul works on, alone, by itself, coldly doing its duty for duty's sake, for the spirit of love is gone.

There is a period when the heart views its object, not as it is, but as it may *be* – for Love is a Prophet – and looks afar into the future. And, thus idealized, the loved one is beautiful, perfect, free

from earthly taint. But when it comes down to real, actual, every day life, the dream is gone, the divinity is discovered to be mortal, with all a mortal's faults and failings. Then comes a chill of disappointment, and then, too often, misunderstanding and alienation. But to those who have faith to see through the present and imperfect, the ideal and beautiful, all failings, all trials will but prove links to unite them more closely; and love will conquer.

The shrill ear-whistle arouses me. The old man wraps the shawl more closely around his companion, takes the huge willow basket on one arm, and with the other tenderly supports her trembling steps. Now they have mounted the platform, the car door closes, the train passes on, but *that picture* still remains with me.

Youthful love is beautiful – beautiful as the morning, with the sunshine on the dew-drops, and the larks singing, and the white, fleecy clouds with the blue sky between them; but the love of the aged is glorious, like the golden sunset; after a fitful April day of winds and showers, when the sunlight has conquered, and the clouds stand back in piles of snow, against the deepening azure.

L.